

Opinion

Horsham Society

with Oliver Farley

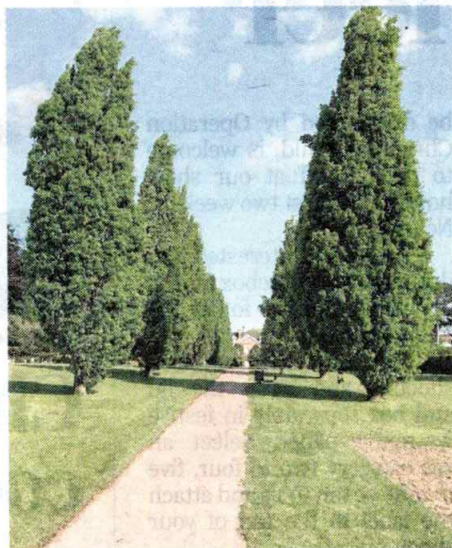


Vital role of green and open spaces

That venerable institution, the Town and Country Planning Association, has drawn attention recently to new government proposals for the creation of a whole generation of garden communities in England.

Perhaps that should be the regeneration of the concept, as the garden city movement dates back to the 19th century and relates to those ideals of healthy living, well-being, economic efficiency, social justice and sound design, all the hallmarks John Ruskin and William Morris among many others. Time has moved on however, the idea has been tried, sometimes more successfully than others, and perhaps the all-inclusive approach is seen today as rather patronising.

Yet despite great progress, social inequalities remain and in very different circumstances, the idea is coming around again. The language used now is that of environmentalism and the supply of affordable housing, but the core aim remains to provide acceptable homes in pleasant surroundings which promote health and welfare for as much of the



Horsham Park

population as can be managed.

Green and open spaces play a part in this process and we in Horsham have a goodly share of spaces ranging from our expansive park to dozens of odd plots, little patches of green left behind from earlier

developments or perhaps all that's left of a once larger space. Even the small ones still come under threat as the minute green by the Drill Hall in Denne Road recently discovered when a planning application went in for a house on the site, the second time in recent years that this has been attempted.

Other areas have seen improvements which we can all applaud. The Remembrance Garden down by the river has had the pavement resurfaced, the landscaping renewed and a bridge constructed over the stream. The emphasis is on making the site an attractive one for general use, with all-weather pavements and benches for the weary. The garden has been there for almost a century now and it is tempting to view it as one oasis in a series of joined up spaces of greens and walkways linking the town together.

The space at the back of Sainsbury's continues the open theme and now has mature trees and forms an inviting continuation of the Remembrance Garden. There's a fine path leading along the river further westwards and in the other direction we can reach the glades of St Leonard's Forest through Chesworth Farm.

Walking in green surroundings is high on the list of desirable attributes for ourselves and our families as the TCPA found out for the Ramblers. Their survey shows that 67 per cent of people walk at least once a week in parks or greens near their home, and 83 per cent think such strolling improves connection with the local community.

Manchester is poised to take things a lot further and will spend £12m to develop healthier and more active communities. It is intended to break down barriers to walking, sport and exercise, and for a start to get every one to walk, jog or run at least a mile a day. While Horsham can't command those sums, it could take thought about linking our existing green spaces more openly across our town as well as around it and thus starting us too on the path to a healthier life style.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 259038.